

## Exploring Missouri's Legacy: State Parks and Historic Sites

Rebecca Conard

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War II; and chapter ten concludes with a lengthy, seventy-one-page, lock-and-dam by lock-and-dam examination of "The Locks and Dams—And Those Who Built Them."

The strength of *Gateways to Commerce* is in chapters seven and eight, which discuss the engineering of the locks and dams. There is far too much detail here for the casual reader; however, much awaits anyone who has an interest in the way that the Corps of Engineers planned, constructed, adapted, modified, refined, and developed the engineering components of this navigation system that turned the free-flowing Mississippi into a series of slack-water pools. Chapter seven carefully examines the engineering history of the system component-by-component: Roller gates, Tainter gates, architecture, locks, and foundations. One theme that emerges clearly is the degree to which good engineering represents careful, intelligent trial and error. The chapter is illustrated with useful drawings and photographs that clarify the structural descriptions and reinforce significant points such as the transition from roller gates to tainter gates.

Overall, this is a very uneven volume. Except in the specifics of the history of engineering, it adds little to the overall body of knowledge about the history of the upper Mississippi. Many of the chapters offer superficial overviews, and the vitality of some of the individual chapters overpowers the sum of the parts. Despite some high points, *Gateways to Commerce* has not synthesized information from the original contracts in a way that is likely to be of interest to the general reader or useful to professionals in a range of disciplines.

*Exploring Missouri's Legacy: State Parks and Historic Sites*, edited by Susan Flader. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992. xiv, 352 pp. Color photographs, bibliographical essay, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY REBECCA CONARD, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

*Exploring Missouri's Legacy* is a stunning celebration of Missouri's state park system. In a book richly illustrated with more than two hundred color photographs, the authors have sought to "capture the essence" of seventy-eight state parks and historic sites (x). This book, however, is emphatically not a guide: there is only one map in all of its 352 pages (not nearly enough), and its oversize, coffee-table format won't stow easily with the outdoor gear. Rather, the closing lines of the preface seem to sum up the collective vision

behind the book's concept and design. With one voice, the authors write, "We hope this book will stimulate some creative thinking about the interrelationships among parks and historic sites and among natural, cultural, and recreational resources and values" (xi). This is a book for armchair exploring and reflection on the past, present, and future of Missouri's state park system.

*Exploring Missouri's Legacy* opens with a brief history of the state park system: its inception, evolution, expansion, and, ultimately, cohesion. In general outline, the history of Missouri's system is similar to Iowa's, and many other state park systems for that matter. Both were authorized by state legislation adopted in 1917. Both systems began to take shape during the 1920s and expanded greatly during the 1930s with the aid of New Deal relief and conservation programs. Both languished during the 1940s when war-time exigencies and then postwar planning for recovery demanded attention. Both experienced a resurgence during the recreation boom of the 1960s. And both have been subject to major bureaucratic upheavals and shifts in administrative direction. Still, there are important differences. For instance, while the two states adopted parallel statutes in the same year, 1917, Missouri was a bit slower to begin acquiring park land. Indeed, the first National Conference on State Parks, held at Des Moines in 1921, is cited as the catalyst for Governor Arthur Hyde to initiate Missouri's land acquisition program. Once started, though, Missouri eventually pieced together a comprehensive system. By 1985, it totalled 103,000 acres, two-thirds acquired as gifts. Missouri, like Iowa, started by acquiring historic sites along with sites of scientific and scenic value. Unlike Iowa, however, this beginning set the direction for an integrated system with cultural, natural, and recreational resources equally managed by the Division of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation in the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. Those interested in the future of Iowa's state-owned historic properties—fewer in number and split between two agencies—will find much of interest in this book.

Following this historical overview, the bulk of the book is devoted to individual "unit" descriptions of all the parks and historic sites that make up the Missouri system, arranged regionally according to the state's six natural divisions: Ozarks, Ozark Border, Mississippi Lowlands, Big Rivers, Osage Plains, and Glaciated Plains. Each section opens with a description of regional topography and geography, followed by text and photographs on each park or site in that region, entries arranged chronologically with three to five pages devoted to each. Typically, the narrative includes both

historical background on the unit itself (not the history of its place in the system) and a description of its natural features. The photographs, many of them taken by noted landscape photographer Oliver Schuchard, display Missouri's parks at their finest. An extensive and easy-to-read bibliographical essay appears at the end of the book, covering just about any topic a reader might wish to explore further: the history of the park system; the movement for public parks and conservation in the United States; Missouri archeology, natural history, and landforms; the cultural resources found in Missouri's state parks; and the culture and history of Missouri's distinct regions.

Although the authors make a point to address political obstacles and past mistakes—the forest at Big Oak Tree State Park that is dying as a result of past park management decisions, for instance—*Exploring Missouri's Legacy* may not stimulate the kind of public debate they seek. Parsing the book into park unit-by-park unit descriptions, each with splendid photographs, encourages cognitive grazing. As a result, the integrated system that is presented as such in the opening essay tends to fragment before the reader's eyes into a multitude of individual jewels. Nonetheless, this is precisely the presentation that is most likely to arouse widespread public interest and to instill citizen pride in the Missouri state park system. If it accomplishes as much, the future may hold more stewardship and fewer instances of park politics. Thoughtfully conceived, well written, and beautifully illustrated, *Exploring Missouri's Legacy* sets a high standard for regional history aimed at a broad public audience.

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